



**Kelly Brough Testimony SB 13-213
Senate Education Committee**

April 15, 2013

Good afternoon, madam vice chair and members of the committee. My name is Kelly Brough and I am president and CEO of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber represents 3,000 businesses and 300,000 employees.

I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 213, the Future School Finance Act. Board members and staff from the Chamber have worked for two years to develop many of the principles represented in this bill. We have devoted so much time to this issue because Colorado's economy depends upon us delivering a workforce that can meet the economic needs of our future. We only have five years to increase the number of college graduates by 20 percent to meet workforce needs. We have to almost double the number of students graduating from high school and completing college with certificates, vocational training, associates degrees or bachelors' degrees.

We support changing the way Colorado's per-pupil funding is determined. The current system in which we count students on a single day has never been a smart or fair way to fund a school district. Changing this system to an average-daily-membership model will incentivize schools to keep students in the classroom – and that benefits students.

Further, this legislation proposes that funding for a student must follow that student – a critical component that rewards schools that attract students mid-year and keep them in school. Research shows that this approach to funding changes the behavior of educational professionals and improves outcomes for our students.

This bill also creates a system that values transparency and accountability. First, schools will be required to disclose how their money is spent. Lifting the veil on classroom spending will help principals, teachers, districts and parents be smarter with school funds. Second, the bill will require a return on investment evaluation that every four years – the first of its kind to track if these dollars actually achieve what has been promised to voters.

This bill also includes a provision allowing for funding for full-day Kindergarten and expanded access to early childhood education through the use of private providers. Data shows that strong early childhood programs provide the best bang for our buck – nearly seven dollars in return for every one dollar spent. Research also shows that starting children with a great foundation ensures that those students are *far* more successful down the road. We also

strongly support allowing private providers deliver these services as it will allow Colorado to more quickly meet the demand for early childhood education with high-quality private providers.

Finally, this proposal would create an innovation fund of \$100 million to allow schools to be creative in their programming, including establishing longer school days and longer school years – which, again, research has shown has a direct and positive impact on learning. We strongly support these innovation grant funds because our educational institutions must become learning organizations themselves. We also feel the bill provides strong oversight to ensure these dollars are managed appropriately and achieve their stated goal.

However, we are very concerned that the level of parity the bill provided between charter schools and other public schools has been removed. The state demands the same accountability from charter schools as it does from other public schools – and these schools were approved by their local school boards – so there is no rational basis to not fund charters at the same level. The district should share a pro-rata pupil amount of mill levy override equal to the amount distributed to other district schools. Charter schools should receive equitable funding, regardless of how many students reside in the district – that is fundamental to a fair system.

The provisions that provide a fair playing field for all public schools (and that rectify the funding for Charter schools) are critical for our support of the bill.

We want to thank Representative Hamner for the time that she and Senator Johnston's team have committed to working on the charter school provisions of the bill. We also would like to thank the League of Charter Schools and the Charter School Institute for the time they have committed to working on these issues. We truly hope that we are close to reaching final resolution on this issue. I do, however, need to state for the record that, if these issues related to charter schools are not resolved, the Chamber will remove its support from SB-213.

The Chamber has worked on this bill because we see it as a promise to Coloradans – something we've not done in education before. A commitment that says, if voters provide additional resources for education, we have a plan in place for how that money must be spent. Some have said we shouldn't work on a bill like this one without the funding in place, but we think of this bill just like you might think of a project list for CDOT. We think voters deserve to know exactly how dollars would be spent **before** they are asked for more money.

Today, we ask you to support the amendments that would ensure parity in funding for charter schools and to support this entire bill – regardless of your feelings on the tax increase that might come later. We think that, by working together, we can create the best plan for ensuring our future workforce is able to meet the needs of our economy.